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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2008

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SUBJECT: EDUCATION MINISTER BLAMES NSC FOR CIRCULAR ON
ARMENIAN "GENOCIDE"

REF: ANKARA 4196

Classified by DCM Robert S. Deutsch. Reasons 1.5(b) and (d).

1. (C) Education Minister Celik asserted to us July 3 that the National Security Council (NSC) is responsible for a circular urging all fifth- and seventh-graders to write an essay arguing that allegations that the Ottomans committed genocide against Armenians are "baseless." The circular was issued in April under Celik's signature (reftel). "This is what the NSC (under military pressure) wanted," Celik said. Celik further lamented the fact that the circular was issued to Turkey's Armenian schools, and that it directed students toward a pre-determined conclusion.

2. (C) Comment: We did not have the opportunity to press Celik further on this issue. Clearly, there is an element of blame-shifting at work. Celik has in the past reflected a narrow view on some hot-button ethnic issues: for example, he once explained to Embassy officers that Kurdish "really isn't a language" (a claim vigorously disputed by Kurds in attendance). Nevertheless, he has been a consistent critic of the Educational Establishment, and the NSC's dominant role in appointing members of the Supreme Education Board (YOK), which is charged with maintaining the Establishment view in educational and related issues. Indeed, education has long been considered to be within the purview of a Turkish State that traditionally has abided by an expansive view of "national security" -- one that goes far beyond traditional security/foreign policy issues. In this context, his comments tend to bolster widespread suspicions (reported reftel) that the NSC is working behind the scenes to raise the profile of controversial issues like the genocide allegations, foment a nationalist backlash and thereby slow the reform process.

PEARSON